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AUTHOR Vogel, Susan A.; Sattler, Joan L.
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ABSTRACT

Intended for college and university admissions officers, faculty, and administration, the booklet presents an overview of learning disabilities (LD) and the implications of LD on postsecondary services. A definition of LD is given, followed by a list of typical characteristics of LD adults. Characteristics of a model comprehensive college LD program are noted, including administrative and faculty support, planning and staff development, and the use of peer tutors. Among the modifications suggested for higher education of LD students are making the syllabus available four to six weeks before the beginning of class, giving assignments both orally and in writing, allowing oral presentations or taped papers instead of written papers, and modifying evaluation procedures through such means as allowing for untimed tests and for oral, taped or typed exams rather than written ones. A list of 12 references and 18 organizations and resources concludes the booklet. (CL)

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THE COLLEGE STUDENT WITH A LEARNING DISABILITY:

A HANDBOOK FOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS OFFICERS, FACULTY, AND ADMINISTRATION

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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BY

Susan A. Vogel, Ph. D.
Barat College
Lake Forest, Illinois

Joan L. Sattler, Ed. D.
Bradley University
Peoria, Illinois

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A learning disability (LD) is a handicap which affects the manner in which individuals take in information, retain it, and express the knowledge and understandings they possess. The most serious and common deficits in LD adults are in reading comprehension, spelling, mechanics of writing, math computation, and/or problem solving. Less frequent, but no less troublesome, are problems in organizational skills, time management, and social interpersonal skills. For most LD adults, language-based and/or perceptual problems are evident.

The most widely accepted formal definition of learning disabilities was formulated in 1968 by the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children and later incorporated into the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Public Law 94-142. It states

Children with special learning disabilities exhibit a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written languages. These may be manifested in disorders of listening, thinking, talking, reading, writing, spelling or arithmetic. They include conditions, which have been referred to as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, developmental aphasia, etc. They do not include learning problems which are due primarily to visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, to mental retardation, emotional disturbance or to environmental disadvantage. (Section 121a.5, **Federal Register,** August 23, 1977.)

The major underlying disorders in basic psychological processes include difficulties in discrimination, (e.g., in perceiving differences between two similar but unlike sounds, words, or symbols), in retaining what is heard or seen, and in expressing what one knows either through oral or written language.

Lack of experience and knowledge about learning disabilities among college and university personnel has caused some individuals to confuse the learning-disabled individual with the retarded individual. The learning disabled are **not** mentally retarded. It may be helpful to keep in mind that Leonardo da Vinci, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison, Woodrow Wilson, and Nelson Rockefeller, among other eminent individuals, were all learning disabled.

1. LD adults have average-to-above intellectual ability.

2. Often there is a marked discrepancy between achievement and potential with uneven abilities within the same individual. LD adults may be able to express ideas orally with fluency and even eloquence, but they may be unable to write these same ideas using correct sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and/or spelling.

3. Each LD adult has a combination of abilities and deficiencies that presents an inconsistent learning profile. Some areas of functioning will be average, above average, or even in the gifted range, while deficiencies will vary from minimal to severe. Areas of functioning of particular concern in postsecondary settings and in adulthood in general include:

a. Oral communication
b. Reading
   1. Decoding skills
   2. Comprehension
   3. Rate
c. Written language
   1. Penmanship
   2. Spelling
   3. Mechanics
   4. Organization
d. Mathematics
   1. Computation
   2. Reasoning
e. Coordination
f. Mechanical ability
g. Interpersonal skills
h. Vocational skills

4. LD adults have processing deficits. Two of the most persistent, residual deficits are auditory and visual perceptual problems. Because some LD adults misperceive what they hear, they misunderstand or do not comprehend what is said. For example, the student who hears "The *lent* is $400 a month" (instead of *rent*) is understandably perplexed. Others have difficulty seeing accurately what is before them. Reversals, rotations, or inversions of numbers and/or letters still plague some LD adults, especially when they are under pressure. They may read $269.06 as $296.06 and, therefore, often have difficulty with personal money mangement. Long and short-term auditory and visual memory deficits are also quite common. Some LD adults have difficulty remembering what they hear. For some, verbal information, such as complex oral directions, is difficult to retain. For others, numerical information, like distances, population size, or dates, may not be retained. Remembering a series of letters, especially necessary in spelling non-phonetic words, requires adequate long-term visual memory. The high proportion of LD adults who are poor spellers attests to the persistence and frequency of this type of memory deficit.

5. Common academic difficulties of LD college students include:

a. Reading
   1. Inaccurate comprehension.
   2. Difficulty finding the important points or main idea.
   3. Problems in integration of material read.
   4. Slow reading rates with inability to adapt reading speed to suit a variety of purposes.
   5. Incomplete mastery of phonics.

b. Written language
   1. Manuscript rather than cursive and overuse of the upper case, even in the middle of a word.
   2. Overly-large handwriting
   3. Poorly formed or illegible letters.
   4. Frequent spelling errors, transpositions of letter (/ro/ for /or/), omissions or substitutions of sounds, and/or attempts at phonetic spelling for non-phonetic words.
   5. Compositions limited in length and sentence structure with problems varying from an abundance of short, simple sentences, sentence fragments and run-on's, to overly-long, complex, and unacceptable syntax, or missing inflectional endings, such as /ed/.
   6. Compositions lacking adequate, over-all organization and development of ideas.

c. Math
   1. Computational skill difficulties.
   2. Reasoning deficits.
   3. Incomplete mastery of basic facts--in particular, the multiplication tables.
   4. Difficulty recalling the sequence of an operational process.
   5. Difficulty understanding and retaining terms representing quantitative concepts.
   6. Associated disorders, such as problems in laterality, left-right orientation, directionality, and social-interpersonal skills.

d. Study skills weaknesses
   1. Organization and budgeting of time.
   2. Initiation and the sustaining of consistent effort on a task.
   3. Note-taking and outlining skills.
   4. Integration of information from various sources.
   5. Test-taking strategies.
   6. Memorization and self-rehearsal strategies.
   7. Use of the dictionary, thesaurus, and other self-help handbooks.
   8. Use of the library.

1. Planning and staff development precede the initiation of the college LD program. During this stage, often taking a year, a pilot program is sometimes launched.

2. The administration supports the program. The President, Vice President, Dean of Faculty, etc. are not only 100% behind the college LD program, but they are enthusiastic and believe the program will be beneficial to all involved.

3. One person, usually an LD specialist, assumes responsibility for the development of the program and is willing to devote the required time to develop and implement the program.

4. Careful academic planning is done to insure that students carry a reasonable load. Such a program is sequential and well-balanced with attention to reading load, written assignments, and other course requirements. Some LD students find they do better by taking 12 semester hours per semester, rather than 15 or 16, or even carrying a part-time load. Other considerations include time frame, e.g., quarter, semester, summer school, or interim periods. How much and how fast material is presented, meeting time of course, length of class period, and number of times-per-week may affect the LD student's success.

5. The faculty are supportive and willing to learn about learning- disabled adults. They consider teaching LD adults a stimulating challenge.

6. The faculty are aware of the requirements of Section 504 of the 1973 Vocational Rehabilitation Act regarding reasonable accommodations and program accessibility for the handicapped, abide by them, and are willing to be flexible without compromising their standards.

7. Diagnosticians or clinicians are on staff or available to the college to do complete psychoeducational evaluations and on-going monitoring of progress, two essentials of a sound program.

8. LD specialists provide remediation in basic skill deficiencies and instruction in compensatory techniques on a one-to-one basis according to an Individual Educational Program developed by the LD student and professional staff.

9. Undergraduate and graduate students, often candidates in LD teacher-training programs, function as peer tutors and provide support in course work, e.g., review and discuss texts and other readings, compare and discuss lecture notes, and quiz each other in preparation for exams.

10. Books and hand-outs are available on tape, and upon request, professors routinely allow students to tape lectures. Readers, notetakers, and scribes may be provided. Visual backup is also available through charts, diagrams, and graphs.

11. Modified examination procedures are accessible, for example, students may have

the option of untimed tests, oral, taped, or typed instead of written exams, objective rather than essay exams, or vice versa.

12. Communication between LD staff and faculty is frequent and welcomed by both. Openness to suggestions on both sides characterize the interchange.

13. Personal counseling, support groups, and/or peer advocates are available to LD students.

14. Career/life planning courses are available following evaluation to help students select a major and determine career goals complementary to their abilities and weaknesses.

15. Writing Labs, Math Centers, Language Labs, Study Skills or Learning Centers are available on campus where LD specialists work with the staff to help them understand each LD student's unique problems, strengths, and learning style.

1. Making syllabus available four to six weeks before beginning of class and when possible, being available to discuss syllabus with LD student considering the course.

2. Beginning lecture/discussions with review and overview of topics to be covered.

3. Using chalkboard or overhead projector to outline lecture material, reading what is written or what is on previously prepared transparencies.

4. Using chalkboard or overhead projector to highlight key concepts, unusual terminology or foreign words (being mindful of legibility and necessity to read what is written).

5. Emphasizing important points, main ideas, and key concepts orally in lecture.

6. Giving assignments in writing, as well as orally, and being available for further clarification.

7. Providing opportunity for participation, question period, and/or discussion.

8. Providing time (during office hours) for individual discussion of assignments, questions about lectures, and readings.

9. Providing study guide for text, study questions, and review sessions to aid in mastering material and preparing for exams.

10. Allowing oral presentation or taped paper instead of written paper.

11. Modifying evaluation procedures by

a. Allowing for untimed tests.
b. Allowing reader for student in objective exam.
c. Providing essay instead of objective exam, or vice versa.
d. Allowing student to take exam in a separate room with a proctor.
e. Allowing for oral, taped, or typed exam instead of written exam.
f. Allowing students to clarify question and rephrase it in their own words as a comprehension-check before answering exam questions.
g. Analyzing process as well as final solution (as in math problems).
h. Allowing alternative methods of demonstrating mastery of course objectives.
i. Allowing student to use a multiplication table, simple calculator, and/or secretary's desk reference in examinations.
j. Avoiding double negatives, unduly complex sentence structure, and embedding questions within questions in composing examination questions.
k. Providing adequate scratch paper and lined paper to aid those students with overly-large handwriting and/or poor handwriting.
l. Providing alternative to computer-scored answer sheets.

* Many of these modification have been made by responsive faculty who did not know how to accommodate the LD adult in their courses and simply asked "How can I increase your learning and the chances of success in my course?" Because they are intelligent and have lived with their learning disability for so long, LD adults themselves are often the best ones to answer this question.

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ACLD Youth and Adult Section. 4156 Library Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15234. Established by and for the LD adult as a self-help, supportive network and information service for the general public.

ACT Assessment Special Testing Guide. This brochure describes how to arrange for special administration of the ACT Assessment. For this and other information about ACT testing write to ACT Test Administration, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, IA 52243.

Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (ACLD). 4156 Library Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15234. ACLD is dedicated to the development of effective educational programs and opportunities which will enhance the possibility of successful life adjustment of LD children and adults.

Association on Handicapped Student Services Programs in Postsecondary Education (AHSSPPE). P.O. Box 886, Ames, IA 50010. Main goal of AHSSPPE is to share information and thus improve services available to disabled college students.

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and **Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD).** 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091. Although CEC is an organization for professionals involved with all areas of exceptionality, CLD is the unit within CEC that focuses on the learning disabled from infancy though adulthood. Both organizations have state and local chapters.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children. The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091.

Higher Education and the Handicapped (HEATH). Closer Look Resource Center, Box 1492, Washington, D.C. 20013. A national clearinghouse of information about services for handicapped postsecondary students. HEATH publishes news bulletins, fact sheets, a resource directory, and other materials.

Higher Education and the Handicapped (HEATH) 1981 Resource Directory. Available free from HEATH Resource Center, Box 1492, Washington, D.C. 20013.

Illinois Council for Exceptional Children (ICEC). Beverly Johns, President. P.O. Box 340, Jacksonville, IL 62651.

Illinois Council for Learning Disabilities (ICLD). Dr. Pamela Gillet, President. Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization, 500 South Plum Grove Road, Palatine, IL 60067.

Information for Counselors and Admissions Officers and **Information for Students with Special Needs.** Admissions Testing Program of the College Board publication on special administration of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (and others) available from ATP: Services for Handicapped Students, Institutional Services, Box 592, Princeton, NJ 08541.

Library of Congress, National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. Washington, D.C. 20542. Catalog lists books available on tape for learning disabled.

Makas, Elaine. **Perspectives.** A booklet on attitudinal barriers facing the learning disabled. Also deals with prevalent myths and provides factual information about learning disabilities. Five vignettes from the lives of learning disabled adults illustrate their abilities and the societal barriers they face. Available for $.80 from Regional Rehabilitation Research Institute on Attitudinal, Legal, and Leisure Barriers, George Washington University, 1828 L Street, N.W., Suite 704, Washington, D.C. 20036.

National Network of Learning Disabled Adults. P.O. Box 3130, Richardson, Texas 75060. NNLDA was established for and by LD adults to enhance communication among themselves and other organizations.

Office of Public Affairs, Office for Civil Rights, Department of Education, Washington, D.C. 20202. Can provide copies and answers to questions about regulations under Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Recordings for the Blind, Inc. 215 E. 58th Street, New York, NY 10022. Taped textbooks available free to learning-disabled college students.

Recruitment, Admissions, and Handicapped Students. Available free from American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, One Dupont Circle, Suite 330, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Time Out to Enjoy, Inc. 113 Garfield Street, Oak Park, IL 60304. A non-profit organization started in 1977 by five adults who have learning disabilities. Its purpose is to educate the public about learning disabilities, to provide support to LD adults, and to collect and provide resources for LD adults.